

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

**Internet Use and Police Work:
Keeping Up with the Times**

**A Leadership White Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**

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June 2018**

ABSTRACT

Law enforcement agencies that do not take advantage of the benefits that come with the use of the internet and social media are doing their community members a dis-service and could be slowing down officer productivity. The use of social media sites can provide law enforcement agencies a free tool to seek the public's assistance in solving crimes by asking for information that can help with identifying crime suspects. Social media sites can also provide an avenue for agencies to post public service announcements as well as provide transparency in the departments functions.

Law enforcement agencies that use the internet and have their own web sites can offer many on line services. These services can include things like easier options for citizens to file reports, request police services, check crime statistics and ask questions. Offering these services on line can allow police officers more time to be proactive in their patrols instead of being busy with low priority calls where a simple report is all that is needed. Law enforcement agencies that do not utilize these alternative methods for taking reports and providing community members an option for requesting police services are essentially slowing officer productivity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction	1
Position	2
Counter Arguments	6
Recommendation	8
References	12

INTRODUCTION

There is no denying that the use of available technology will play a key role in the future of every business and organization. The public expects law enforcement agencies to provide high quality service. In order to meet these expectations, law enforcement agencies must embrace the technological changes that are flooding society. There is a myriad of technological products available to law enforcement, including body-worn cameras (BWC) to unmanned aircraft and social media.

Law enforcement has seen many changes throughout the years. Sir Robert Peel founded most modern community policing models. Peel created the Metropolitan Police in 1829 based upon nine principles (Wasilewski & Olson, 2012). Peel's principles define the purpose and mission of policing. The principles also provide admonishments for police agencies to ensure they do not forget why they exist and who they are sworn to serve (Roufa, 2017).

One of the earliest forms of law enforcement's use of technology is the Texas Law Enforcement Communications System (TLETS). The Texas Department of Public Safety's (TxDPS) website states that TLETS, created in 1937, incorporated the use of six torn-tape teletype network machines (n.d.). TLETS provides law enforcement officers with valuable information regarding vehicle ownership, driver's license records, arrest records, wanted persons and stolen items. TLETS also provides information to law enforcement officers regarding missing and lost persons. This database stores information on registered sex offenders, persons released on parole and persons who have proven to be affiliated with criminal gangs or radical protest groups. Having this

information can help prepare officers for possible safety concerns during encounters with wanted individuals.

Technological advances have forced law enforcement authorities to rethink the way police work is accomplished. Due to the technological advances that the world has experienced, law enforcement agencies have had to learn to adapt and embrace the technological tools that are being developed. One of the most important changes is the development of technology and the different services that come with these advances.

Law enforcement agencies should take advantage of available technology such as social media and offering on line services to become more effective. These technologies empower law enforcement officers with capabilities and information far from what was available in the past. Technological advances that are available for law enforcement agencies can provide several different benefits, including increased officer productivity, improved, as well as advanced investigative skills, and implementation of community service applications. The use of the internet and social media allows law enforcement agencies the ability to interact with their community, offering heightened customer service as well as providing departmental transparency.

POSITION

Many new technological advances that have developed within the last decade can be valuable tools to assist law enforcement agencies and their officers with day-to-day activities. These technological advances can help law enforcement officers become more efficient in their police patrols as well as increase department productivity. The greatest technological advances that law enforcement agencies have access to are the internet and social media. The use of the internet and social media can be of great

benefit to law enforcement agencies by offering an alternative for making public service announcements and seeking the public's help in identifying wanted persons. Instead of only having news stations air requests by police for the public's assistance in identifying a wanted suspect, departments can post information on their social media sites as well.

Law enforcement agencies should take advantage of social media platforms in order to reach more of their community members. Membership to most social media sites is free, making social media one of the most affordable tools available to law enforcement. Social media sites reach millions of people every day, making it a very effective form of public relations. With the exponential growth of social networking, one way law enforcement agencies can benefit by it is to utilize social media to promote their departments, post public service announcements and to ask the public's assistance in criminal investigations.

Community policing, as defined by The United States Department of Justice (2013), is a law enforcement agency's plan to recognize and prevent situations within their community that could become issues of crime and public safety. Community policing incorporates the use of partnerships between city officials, businesses, individual citizens, non-profit groups and the media in order to create and implement methods to police the community. If these organizations work together, they can be a strong force to address criminal matters and reduce crime. These community partnerships, working along with the local law enforcement agencies, can make a great impact on crime prevention. Instead of leaving it solely to the police force, community policing revolves around a philosophy that the entire community can actively take steps

to prevent crime. The use of the internet and social media can help bring these partnerships together, sharing ideas, public safety information and crime statistics.

More and more law enforcement agencies are making it possible for citizens to report non-emergency crimes by phone or through internet online reporting. More than 450 law enforcement agencies across North America have implemented online crime reporting (Garot & Marte, 2017). There are several benefits to this alternative way to report non-emergency crimes. This practice will remove the issue of long response times for police officers to arrive at a citizen's house to take a report. Citizens will not have to wait for an officer who may be on an emergency call or taking a report from another citizen.

Another benefit is that it allows law enforcement officers more time to be proactively patrolling the community and available to focus on responding to emergency calls. It is estimated that law enforcement officers spend as much as 20% of their time each day writing reports (Brewer, 2007). Officers can now spend more time patrolling their communities, making personal contacts and focusing on proactive police work.

Social media is another form of technology that law enforcement agencies can use as a tool to be more efficient and proactive. There has been an overwhelming increase in the number of people using social media within the last ten years (Brunty & Helenek, 2012). With the increasing number of citizens utilizing at least one form of social media, law enforcement agencies can reach a much-broader population.

At the 2013 Social Media, the Internet and Law Enforcement (SMILE) conference, Philadelphia Police Department's social media manager, Frank Domizio, explained the benefits of a Facebook page, a Twitter account, and, any other public

communication platform that allows law enforcement agencies to connect with their community (Burger, 2013). These benefits include building trust and a sense of community, having better control over the department's reputation within the community, posting public service announcements and allowing citizens to ask questions and provide crime tips.

Social media can be beneficial as a means of mass communication. Social media can be used as a tool to influence public opinion (Crump, 2012). Law enforcement agencies now have the ability to post positive news happening with their departments. Agencies can also post public service announcements and safety tips for their citizens.

As law enforcement agencies continue to transition to more transparency and information sharing, there has been an increase in their use of social media to aid in criminal investigations. Anyone with a Facebook account can view various law enforcement agencies Facebook page and find information regarding active investigations, some even having photos or videos of wanted suspects.

A 2015 survey conducted by the International Association of Chiefs of Police, 553 agencies were surveyed and of those agencies, 96.4% use social media in some capacity (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2015). Of the 553 agencies, 88.7% stated they use social media for investigations and 92.3% use it to review profiles and activities of suspects (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2015). This survey shows how valuable social media is to law enforcement as an affordable, technological investigative tool. Another important technological tool used by law enforcement officers are mobile data terminals (MDT's). The combination of the MDT

and access to TLETS provides law enforcement patrol officers with the primary tools needed to perform their duties every day. Having MDT's in patrol cars allows officers to complete incident reports while still in the field.

When officers can conduct their administrative tasks from their patrol vehicle, they are not having to return to the police office to complete incident reports. This allows officers to return to their patrol duties sooner. Law enforcement officers are able to be more community oriented in their patrol because they spend less time in the police office and more time being out in the communities serving the citizens they serve.

COUNTER ARGUMENTS

When the New Orleans Police Department announced their implementation of online and phone in police reporting of non-emergency crimes, Anthony Radosti of the Metropolitan Crime Commission voiced his concerns. Rodasti was worried that the technology required to file online police reports would not be available to low income households, and those who do have the technology may find the process too technical for many victims to be able to complete, causing them to abandon the report process (Robin 2017).

Radosti's concerns are unfounded. Online reporting is only one option for citizens to report non-emergency crimes. There are several options for reporting a crime. Citizens can use a non-emergency police contact number to speak to a police official and file a report (Robin 2017). Citizens can still request an officer to come to their home to take a report, though it may be quicker and more convenient to file a report on line, at the convenience of the citizen.

Another reason some may resist the use of technology for law enforcement agencies to conduct their day-to-day tasks is that the use of technology takes away from the human side of community policing (Nilson & Burke, 2002). Policing from behind the computer screen removes the face-to-face interaction between officers and the community. Without the face-to-face interaction with community members, police officers may not have the opportunity to get to know the community they serve.

The law enforcement use of social media has actually shown to improve policing practices and build community trust (Crump, 2012). Law enforcement agencies that utilize social media to connect with their community, provides transparency and openness, allowing citizen to voice concerns, ask questions and provide crime tips. This creates a feeling of unity and service, being part of a positive change for their community. The technology behind social media “allows for the dissemination of information to a large audience, including traditional media outlets and community members, in real time” (Kolb, 2012, para. 5). With the emergence of social media, the printing and circulation of traditional newspapers has declined drastically since 2001 because social media markets have replaced them as the primary source for seeing the news (Saba, 2009).

Some people believe that police reports that are filed online or over the phone do not get the same attention and investigative procedures as those taken by an officer in the field and that fewer than one percent of crimes reported online get solved (Garot & Marte, 2017). However, there no evidence to show that police reports taken by a police officer in the field is investigated differently, or that there is a difference in solvability

between those reports entered online or over the phone and reports taken in the filed by a police officer (Garot & Marte, 2017).

It is also thought that submitting police reports online or over the phone can result in duplicate reports being made or that there will be false reports filed. However, there is no difference in the possibility of false reports being filed on line and those being filed with a police officer in the field. Citizens are informed of the consequences of filing a false report and if they ignore the notice, they will face the criminal charges that will result. A police officer reviews all police reports and if there are any questions or issues that need clarification, the officer will contact the citizen who made the report (Robin, 2017).

RECOMMENDATION

As law enforcement agencies seek innovative ways to conduct business, it is important that they consider different technological advances that are available. When law enforcement agencies take advantage of available technology, they can become more effective in the ways they conduct day-to-day tasks. Technological advances can assist with training and improve officer responses to critical incidents. Improved training can provide law enforcement officers with valuable skills to ensure their safety as well as the safety of the community. Law enforcement agencies should take advantage of available technology such as social media and offering on line services to become more effective.

Social media can assist with disseminating notices to the public, assist in investigations, and provide an avenue for agencies to connect with the community. Online and phone reporting can provide citizens with the convenience of filing reports

on their time, and not having to wait for extended response times for a police officer to arrive. Law enforcement officers can spend more time actively patrolling the communities instead of responding to non-emergency calls.

The internet is a valuable tool available to law enforcement agencies. Online and phone reporting by citizens can reduce a patrol officer's time on non-emergency calls. Any citizen that is not able to file an online report or are not familiar with computers can make a report over the phone. Anthony Radosti of the Metropolitan Crime Commission was concerned that the technology required to file online police reports would not be available to low income households, and others may find the process too technical to complete, causing them to abandon the report process (Robin, 2017). However, online reporting is only an option for citizens. Those wishing to meet with an officer to file a report still have that option available to them.

Some would argue that without the face-to-face interaction with community members, police officers might not have the opportunity to get to know the community they serve and prevent the ability for officers to build community relations. However, those having these reporting options actually allows officers to be actively patrolling the community, making citizen contacts, and building relationships with citizens. The use of social media by law enforcement has actually shown to improve policing practices and build community trust (Crump, 2011).

It is time for law enforcement agencies to enter the 21st century and start implementing more uses of technology to effectively and efficiently progress their departments. As technology is continuing to change, progress and replace ways of doing business, law enforcement agencies must also adapt and make these changes.

There is a vast amount of information exchanged over social media, allowing people to share information over a great amount of distance.

If law enforcement agencies take advantage of the access to so much information, they will find that social media is a great tool for investigating crime as well as reaching out to the community. Law enforcement agencies can utilize social media platforms to promote civic activities, positive police encounters with citizens and provide public service information to the community. At a time when social media is so profoundly used to discredit and disrespect law enforcement officers, agencies can use the same platforms to highlight positive events happening within the department as well as positive events happening in the community.

Technology changes rapidly, with software, new hardware, and, new upgrades. Law enforcement agencies and community leaders need to clearly identify and evaluate new technology before adopting its use for the department. The effectiveness, efficiency and evolution of its use must also be reviewed to ensure there are no threats to public privacy and individual rights.

Law enforcement agencies must also implement policies regarding the use of technology and recognize any community concerns that may come with its use. There must be consistent standards set to ensure implementation and effective use of the technology is recognized.

Law enforcement agencies should encourage public input when developing a policy for the use of new technology. Community members will be more accepting and positive toward the technology if they are given a voice and have been informed of the

use and reason for the use of it. This input will also show transparency, credibility, and, the desire to serve the citizens of the community.

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